

also an increasing tendency to follow out the fate of unit characters where very distinct groups mix, as among the Laps and Nords in Norway or the Chinese and Polynesians in Hawaii. Finally one notes with sympathetic interest increasing efforts to link race-study with demography to the profit of both and of the public well-being.

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*Sterilization and Mental Deficiency.* Central Association for Mental Welfare, price 2d., 8 pp., London 1923.

The C.A.M.W. have issued a small pamphlet on Sterilization and Mental Deficiency which will naturally attract considerable attention. It consists of a memorandum together with the report of the Medical Committee of the Association.

The following sentences indicate, I believe, the main point to which the Association wish to draw attention, and we endorse in the strongest possible manner the opinions here expressed.

"The only way of safeguarding defectives from the consequences incident to their defect, and at the same time guarding the community, is by segregating those who have anti-social tendencies or whose homes afford insufficient protection. This has the same racial effect as sterilization, but it does more than sterilization in that it reduces the immediate social dangers. The Mental Deficiency Act goes a long way towards providing the necessary machinery, but unfortunately there are many areas of the country in which the Act is still very inadequately administered . . . we therefore press for more institutions adapted to the needs of those persons. For if it is necessary for the safety of the community that certain defectives should be deprived of their liberty—as it undoubtedly is—it is only just to them that we should make the deprivation as little irksome, and their surroundings as interesting and varied, as is possible."

The following extracts from the report of the Medical Committee indicate the attitude adopted in regard to sterilization. "Regarding sterilization in general, we think there can be little doubt that its extensive application to certain well defined and readily recognisable types in the community would, by eliminating those types, be attended with more or less pronounced racial changes . . . We therefore feel that any conclusion reached at the present time must be of a provisional nature. Nevertheless, after giving careful consideration to such evidence and opinions as are available, we feel that we are justified in stating as our opinion that sterilization of defectives is not under existing conditions a practical policy, though it may be applicable to individual cases."

As regards the policy which could be adopted at the present time, I am inclined only to differ in holding that a considerable number of individual cases might be dealt with and that consequently the whole policy in connection with sterilization ought to be carefully thought out. The memorandum advocates the greater use of that section of the Act which makes provision "for the exercise of Statutory Supervision"—that is the supervision of mental defectives in private dwellings. The Medical Committee state that no particulars are available in regard to the subsequent careers of those who have been

sterilized in America, that is after they have been set at liberty. We feel that there is also a want of information concerning the careers of certified mental defectives who are under supervision in England in accordance with the Act. How many are there of such cases? What records are there of procreation taking place amongst them? Have any of them married? What steps can be taken if they do marry? Full information on all these points would enable us to form a better judgment as to the racial dangers involved in giving liberty to mental defectives. We cannot but fear that "judicious and kindly supervision" exercised by an occasional visitor is but an uncertain safeguard against procreation.

The main argument against sterilization appears to be that "there can be little doubt that any general adoption of sterilization would, in actual practice, lead to the non-segregation of a large number of defectives who should be under care, and thus to an increase of the social evils mentioned." This means that there can be no doubt that our local authorities cannot be trusted to do their duties effectively. This may now be true; but it is also often true that the more the hands of the authorities are tied, the less efficient they become. In the long run it would be best to give the authorities a free hand to select the "individual cases" for sterilization, these being such as could be advisably sent home with this precaution and not without it, and where the consent of the relatives could be obtained.

The memorandum states that sterilization would add to the expenditure involved. If the law were properly administered, mental defectives would never be detained in prisons or workhouses, and would in all cases be transferred at once to institutions where "remunerative work is performed." In these circumstances I fail to see how it could on the whole be other than economic.

Another point on which information would be valuable is in regard to the statement of the Medical Committee that the majority of mental defectives "are either the children of parents who appear to be normal, although frequently 'carriers,' or of those suffering from insanity, psychoneuroses, or a mild degree of mental or physical abnormality which is not certifiable."

The largest collection of pedigrees of the feeble in mind which is known to me is in Goddard's 'Feeble-mindedness,' 327 in all. Over 46 per cent. of these show that the feeble-minded individual in question had had a feeble-minded parent or grand parent; whilst about 60 per cent of the remainder had a parent or grand parent about whom little was known, some of whom presumably might also have been feeble in mind. These figures indicate that nearly if not quite half of this class of mental defectives would not have come into existence as they did, if sterilization of all mental defectives had been in force for a century. Probably the American field-workers take a different standard of mental defect to that adopted in England, and it would be extremely interesting if similar figures could be obtained in regard to the 200 pedigrees collected by Dr. Tredgold.

We cannot help wishing that the Association had looked to the future and had considered what policy might be adopted in a more enlightened age; for this is the way to lead public opinion. If public

prejudices were allayed, would it be possible to sterilize as a matter of routine certain mental types on leaving school? If such a plan could be adopted, the results in stamping out not only mental deficiency but also those numerous hereditary failings which are associated with it might be very considerable. Is it certain that this will always be "impracticable from the difficulties which in actual practice would attend the diagnosis and selection of cases?" Thoughtful teachers of mental defectives, when they only just succeed in making their pupils able to go out into the world, must often doubt whether the harm thus done does not outweigh the good. Sterilization would in some cases do away with the scruples felt by those engaged in this splendid work.

L.D.